

Communion Meditation - TIME -
January 2, 1972
Ephesians 5:15-17
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I have read this morning two portions of the Bible that refer to time: that well known passage from Ecclesiastes and Paul's advice to the Ephesians that instructs the early Christians to "use the present opportunity to the full" the R. S. V. translates it, "Make the most of the time".

There are essentially two different ways of talking about time; the Biblical way and our way. In Greek the two ways are expressed in two different words - both of which are translated "time" in English. KAIROS - refers to time with specific content; time that is defined by what is happening in it. In the fullness of time" - that is Kairos. CHRONOS - from which we get "chronological", means simply the quantity of time elapsed, as opposed to the quality of time in Kairos.

July 4, 1776 - that's a statement of Chronos, chronological time.

Independence Day = that's a statement of Kairos; an indicator of a significant event in history, even though both refer to the same day in the story of America.

All things considered, the Bible is just not too interested in Chronos - the quantitative measurement of time. To be sure, the ancients recorded days and months and years. The ^{Psalmist} asks God to "teach us to number our days". But the continuing and important Biblical emphasis on time is always in terms of Kairos - the significant events that are happening or are about to happen. The ^{Israelites} were concerned primarily with time in terms of planting, harvest, the day of atonement, the day of sacrifice, the day of the Lord's coming

They saw their history moving toward one central "Kairos" event; the coming of God in the Messiah. And in the New Testament, the early Christians were very much aware that they lived in a new day = a new time - a whole new era, because of what God had done in Jesus Christ.

Now that may sound rather academic, and if ever there is a time to avoid dry academics it is January 2. Except for the fact that you and I, and the rest of Western Civilization are obsessed with chronos - with the chronological measurement

of time, at the expense of Kairos. And if you aren't ready to buy that statement, consider the fact that nearly everyone of us wears a mechanical device ^{with} which to measure chronological time, and that those devices would be very much in evidence, along with a lot of shuffling and throat clearing, should I extend this particular sermon, say to an hour or so - even though it just may be a significant event in the life of the congregation. That is to say, we are much more concerned with chronos than Kairos; with the quantity of time elapsing rather than the quality of whatever is happening in the time.

In a recent book, a young theologian (To a Dancing God, S. Keen) suggests that the industrial revolution and western civilization ^{were} ~~will~~ symbolically ^{born} ~~learn~~ with the invention of the portable clock. Before that invention time was measured by the organic rhythm of desire and satisfaction, planting and harvest..... "That is to say, Kairos governed life, rather than Chronos. But today, The clock is now grafted into the psyche and replaces the rhythm of the body and nature with the prefabricated cadence of the metronome. We march to the beat of an alien pacemaker, eating when the clock strikes 8, 12, and 6, working five times eight hours per week, and retiring from *labor* at age sixty-five." (P.52-53) The clock and the calendar, the tools of Chronos - govern our living, almost completely.

In fact, if we are not using our energy to keep pace with our watches and calendars we are using it to fight the passage of time. Think, for instance about the amount of money, ingenuity and creativity invested in the effort to deny the fact that we are getting older. The Rev. Ernest Campbell calls it "The Ponce de Leon Anxiety". (The Protestant Hour January 1970) Ponce, you will recall, was a Spanish Conquistador who discovered Florida, but ^{what} ~~not~~ he was really looking for was a legendary spring whose waters could make old men young again. Ponce was 52 when he set out to find the fountain of youth, which fact prompts Campbell to remark that "Those of us who have known that heat of forty summers or more can readily identify with this quest. We fight the calendar the way a loosing football team fights the clock."

Consider our cultural fetish with youth. We are possessed with a passion to remain young, that is, to deny the passage of time) we tint gray hair black again, we invoke the skills of cosmetician and plastic surgeon; our eye is caught by advertising that excludes anyone over thirty; and we quaff the drink "for those who think young" even though they aren't.

Now, that's not ^{bad} ~~bad~~, in my opinion. On balance there is probably something very healthy about refusing to give in to the changes time brings: youth is great, although "wasted on the young". There is no reason any man ought to roll over and play dead.

But there is a point at which the effort becomes an obsession - a sickness: a point at which we want to deny reality ^{to} ~~to~~ avoid the Kairos. At that point we are slaves to the calendar and very foolish.

The theologian I cited earlier suggest that the foolish man is one "who is always holding on to the past or grasping at the future: whose entire life becomes a ^{vain} ~~vain~~ effort to run from death by using the energies of life to create a monument or a memory."

"Wisdom comes, usually with age, when a man can look back on his years and realize that there is an economy to the seasons of life. He sees that the times of strife, suffering and waiting which seemed so difficult to endure were as necessary to the formation of ^{personality} ~~personality~~ as the times of love, joy and ecstasy. To love and accept the self at it is is to accept all the moments that formed it. "(Apology for Wonder P 196-197)

That sounds very much like that ancient wisdom that instructed: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; etc."

The Bible teaches us to think about time in terms of Kairos - to think about the significance of time and not its duration: in personal terms to regard time as a gift given to be used, and not an adversary to be fought.

So we come to New Years, that event in the secular calendar that indicates

Chronos = the movement of time. And yet, even as we say the words that indicate what time it is, we make a tremendous theological affirmation - A Kairos statement. For, it is the year of our Lord, 1972.

It is the era of Jesus Christ: it is a year of God's continuing activity. It is time made significant by the birth of Jesus Christ, 1,972 years ago. That event, by which we measure time, means that life is not just a progression toward death: in fact, the coming of Jesus Christ means that death is not the end of time and no longer to be feared. It means that we are free of any need to resist time, to be enslaved by it; free to regard time as a gift, to live in harmony with it, and to expend our energies, not denying it, but using it to its fullest.

All of that is bound up in the affirmation, "The Year of our Lord, 1972." And we observe it in a ritual which celebrates the same truth. At the communion table we are attesting to the presence of God in our midst, the continuity of his love, the timeless nature of his concern for us.

Time. Wouldn't it be nice to know how to live with time: to use responsibly the time we have: to have the grace to regard every moment of time given us as a precious gift, an opportunity, a possibility?

I would like to share with you a prayer written by a French priest, Michel Quoist, under the title, Lord, I Have Time

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Father, we are grateful for the time you have given us. Give us grace, to accept the movement and rhythm of time, and help us to use every day responsibly and gratefully: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen